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Review of the capacity of the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The escalation in the past decade of ruthless internal conflicts and the phenomena of imploding State structures have changed dramatically the context in which humanitarian actions are undertaken.

2. In its resolution 1995/56, the Economic and Social Council urged the United Nations humanitarian system to review its capacity to respond to humanitarian crises and disasters. Since then the United Nations humanitarian system, in collaboration with non-governmental, bilateral and international organizations, has assessed its effectiveness and considered options for overcoming limitations and enhancing its capacity to respond to crises.

3. Since the adoption of Council resolution 1995/56, the governing bodies of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have examined and in many instances adopted recommendations to strengthen their organizational capacity, as well as to encourage cooperation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) of the Secretariat and other organizations to ensure a coherent system-wide approach to humanitarian assistance.

4. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) undertook a detailed review of systemic issues most relevant to a coherent system-wide approach. The deliberations and decisions of the governing bodies of the United Nations humanitarian organizations were considered during these inter-agency consultations. The main objective of IASC in undertaking this review was to move towards a more strategic approach to humanitarian assistance that would not only enable members of IASC to respond better to crises but would also focus on capacity building and enhance support and linkage with recovery and rehabilitation activities - a strategic approach that would contribute to the peace-making and peace-building efforts of the United Nations. The review process by the Council in itself was useful in fostering an improved culture of cooperation among members of IASC. In preparing this report, due weight was given to the deliberations, conclusions and recommendations of IASC.

5. The highly volatile nature of today's conflicts and resultant threats to regional peace and security have brought about an increased role for the Security Council. Yet there is rarely sufficient consensus within the

international community to address the root causes of these crises. Given the political context, it is fitting that IASC has adopted an approach to coordination that recognizes the importance of an integrated response to crises wherever possible. However, one must recognize that without political action, humanitarian activities are but a palliative.

6. Humanitarian activities take place in a political environment and thus are affected by and affect that environment. One must ensure that there is effective provision of humanitarian assistance and that it is provided in an impartial and appropriate manner that meets the differing needs of intended beneficiaries. Within the United Nations, the challenge is to respect humanitarian principles and the distinct nature of the humanitarian endeavours, while ensuring a coherent approach among the political, security, and humanitarian sectors.

7. Civilians are increasingly subject to intentional human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. People in need are denied access to humanitarian assistance for reasons of political and military expediency. Massive population displacements result from these violations; how to ensure respect for international humanitarian law by warring parties is a growing challenge. The humanitarian community is also grappling with an ambivalence towards its role with respect to human rights. Some fear that reporting human rights abuses will jeopardize humanitarian access to the victims thereof and worry that judging who is responsible for human rights abuses will impede the ability to act with impartiality and neutrality. Others believe that humanitarian action can be credible and effective only when the protection of basic human rights is ensured. The specific issue of the protection of women's human rights in times of conflict is also a complication that has not been addressed adequately.

8. The abuse of humanitarian assistance and resources and the targeting of humanitarian aid workers through harassment, hostage-taking and murder are increasing. Attacks on aid workers have varied objectives: disrupting negotiations, preventing humanitarian workers from helping the "enemies", and removing potential witnesses to atrocities. Such abuse and attacks further complicate the provision of humanitarian assistance.

9. Effective provision of aid and targeted prioritization are dependant on a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the impact of conflict on different segments of society, on gender relations, and on the distribution of

power within communities. Much of the current critique of the international response to crisis has focused on the lack of attention to these dimensions and their policy implications.

10. The most important challenge facing the humanitarian community remains the provision of coherent, effective, and timely assistance to those in need. Improved coordination among and between national bodies, the United Nations and the international community is essential to better serve those in need. It is with these ends in mind that 1995 and 1996 saw intense debate by humanitarian organizations both within and outside the United Nations. The Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda and the review engendered by Council resolution 1995/56 were the two most prominent catalysts to this debate.

11. The present is an interim report, describing the setting and focusing on the capacity of the United Nations humanitarian system to respond to complex crises. The report does not, at this stage, address institutional issues or include specific recommendations. These issues will be dealt with and IASC recommendations drawn upon, in the first instance, in the report on United Nations reform that will be presented to the General Assembly on 16 July. They can be further pursued in a subsequent report to the Council, should it so request.

II. UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION

12. It is the responsibility of each national authority to meet the humanitarian needs of its citizenry, but the scope and nature of a crisis often require the support of the international community. This section presents the framework through which the United Nations responds.

13. In the humanitarian field, organizations have either sectoral or target-group specific mandates that could lead to intersection and overlap if not addressed through coordination. A review of recent experiences of complex emergencies has revealed certain gaps in the system. While progress has been made on furthering complementarity in action, the issue of gaps remains a critical one.

14. In the context of crises, UNHCR and UNICEF have mandates to protect and assist refugees and children; WFP, FAO and WHO have sectoral mandates in food aid, food and agriculture, and health care. UNDP has a role in fostering sustainable development practices. Coordinating responsibilities for humanitarian assistance rest with DHA. United Nations operational

organizations are generally involved to varying extents in all three phases of an emergency: pre-crisis and prevention, crisis, and recovery. Even if mandates are very clear, it is obvious that overlap may occur. The gaps in mandates within the United Nations humanitarian system requiring critical attention are: (a) the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons; (b) demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants; (c) mine-related activities; and (d) the provision of common services. Other gaps include joint contingency planning, assessments and training. In such cases, the humanitarian needs are addressed on an ad hoc basis, although sometimes without the optimal experience and expertise.

15. In order to enhance coordination and improve response effectiveness, particularly in avoiding duplication and minimizing gaps, humanitarian organizations have entered into Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) 1/ and other bilateral agreements to clarify division of responsibilities. These agreements recognize and rely on each organization's comparative advantages and special skills. They aim to give consistency and predictability to the relationship between organizations. Aspects elaborated include joint contingency planning, joint assessments and the development of standards and guidelines. These agreements are also important for accelerating response in emergency situations. IASC should review current MOUs and similar agreements and encourage new ones.

16. Progress has been made in clarifying and furthering relationships between United Nations humanitarian organizations and those outside the United Nations system. Thus bilateral agreements govern relationships between various United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, 2/ the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Organization on Migration (IOM). Some of these understandings are meant to be global, others are region-specific. In addition, several organizations are actively strengthening their cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions.

17. The General Assembly, in its resolution 46/182, established IASC to serve as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination and to formulate and guide coherent and timely United Nations responses to emergencies. IASC is responsible for the development of system-wide humanitarian policies, and

for ensuring an integrated, strategic approach for complex emergencies. It determines priorities and allocates responsibilities, including the selection of humanitarian coordinators.

18. The members of IASC are the heads or the designated representatives of the United Nations humanitarian organizations (UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, FAO and WHO). In addition, there is a standing invitation to IOM, ICRC, 2/ IFRC and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the NGO consortia the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), InterAction and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) to attend. The Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and the Bretton Woods institutions are invited to participate on an ad hoc basis, as appropriate to the subject-matter. The work of IASC is supported by a number of subsidiary bodies, including the IASC Working Group.

19. The effectiveness of IASC to serve as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination rests on the premise that its members are committed and accountable to the Committee's decisions and processes. As the chairperson of IASC, the Emergency Relief Coordinator has a special responsibility to ensure that the Committee functions effectively. For IASC to function effectively as a central policy and operational decision-making forum, it requires effective administrative and substantive support.

20. NGOs are an integral part of the humanitarian assistance activities of the United Nations. Their field workers, in most cases, are the ultimate service providers, working as implementing partners with United Nations organizations. Three NGO consortia - InterAction, ICVA and SCHR - contribute actively to debate within IASC and thus add their collective knowledge and experience. The consortia see a serious need to improve cooperation among members of IASC if disaster victims are to receive adequate assistance and donor funds are to be spent prudently and effectively. These organizations will continue to participate actively in the work of IASC.

21. The magnitude and complexities of emergencies over the past five years have clearly demonstrated the critical role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The Coordinator reports to the Secretary-General and interfaces with the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations and with the

Security Council. The growing need to deliver humanitarian assistance in internal conflicts and other insecure environments has underscored the importance of the Coordinator in advising the Secretary-General and the Security Council on the humanitarian perspective of the overall United Nations response to these crises. The Coordinator must ensure a well-coordinated, effective and rapid system-wide response to emergencies, as well as assume a global advocacy role to facilitate a United Nations response that addresses the political, security and humanitarian dimensions of a crisis, while upholding the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance.

22. DHA provides support to the Emergency Relief Coordinator in discharging his/her coordination responsibilities for complex emergencies and natural disasters. In this regard, DHA assists the Coordinator to ensure the coordination of United Nations response to complex emergencies and natural disasters, to ensure clear and timely division of labour among United Nations operational agencies, to support advocacy for humanitarian principles and issues, to promote best practices in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and to identify and assign responsibility for gaps within the humanitarian response. The responsibilities of DHA also encompass prevention, mitigation and response to natural, technological and environmental disasters.

23. The exponential growth in humanitarian assistance requirements and the burgeoning complexity of crises, combined with the sheer numbers of organizations responding, demand more intensive levels of consultation, cooperation and coordination at the field level.

24. Historically, the Resident Coordinator has assumed tne role of harnessing humanitarian assistance. However, in complex or overtly political situations, such as Cambodia, southern Sudan, northern Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, special arrangements were put in place on a case-by-case basis, including the designation of a lead agency to coordinate the international humanitarian response. In several recent emergencies, such as Angola and Liberia, Humanitarian Coordinators have been appointed separate from the Resident Coordinator. In other cases the two functions have been carried out by the same individual.

25. IASC examined a number of different coordination arrangements. Distinctions were made between strategic and operational coordination. A unitary system of coordination based on the resident coordinator system was considered desirable in order to provide better linkage between relief and

development assistance, avoid duplication, and streamline coordination structures. IASC would be fully involved in the selection and appointment of such humanitarian coordinators. IASC further considered that the resident/humanitarian coordinator should not have operational responsibilities and should be accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Furthermore, the responsibilities of the humanitarian coordinator should be delinked from the responsibility of the resident representative of UNDP. Certain circumstances, however, may still require the appointment of a humanitarian coordinator separate from the resident coordinator.

26. Where there is a special representative of the Secretary-General with overall responsibility for United Nations system activities in country, IASC highlighted the importance of clearly defining the relationship between the resident/humanitarian coordinator and the Special Representative as soon as possible.

27. International assistance and protection for tens of millions of internally displaced persons are hampered by the absence of a coherent and organized response to their needs. The protection of internally displaced persons is the responsibility of the individual government, but where the national authorities are unable or unwilling to provide this, humanitarian organizations have found it necessary to give protection to this most vulnerable population in the context of their humanitarian assistance.

28. Over the past few years, United Nations agencies and partner organizations have strengthened their capacities to address the needs of internally displaced persons. Assistance and protection have been provided to such persons as a vulnerable population within the mandates of United Nations agencies or, in the case of UNHCR, on a case-by-case extension of its mandate. However, no agency has a global or comprehensive mandate to assist and protect internally displaced persons, nor are there satisfactory arrangements at Headquarters or in the field to coordinate assistance.

29. In 1994, DHA was assigned the role of the focal point in the United Nations system for action against landmines. Its task includes advocacy for the global banning of mines and support for mine clearance activities, mobilizing resources, promoting capacity-building for mine action programmes, and management of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance Activities.

30. Relevant United Nations organizations and increasing numbers of NGOs are involved in various aspects of humanitarian mine clearance and mine awareness/education activities. ICRC is also very active in advocating for the ban on landmines and caring for victims of landmines. In the field, therefore, DHA aims to ensure that all elements of the United Nations mine programme are in place, that priorities have been negotiated and established and that the programme is executed efficiently and effectively. In consultation with the national Government, United Nations agencies and NGOs, DHA works out the necessary division of responsibilities among operational organizations, taking into account their comparative advantage and in-country capacity.

31. Precipitate exit from a humanitarian assistance programme may be as damaging as one that is too late. If survival conditions have not been attained or security guarantees for the population are not in place, early exit may trigger further conflict and place populations at risk and create new humanitarian crises. However, a delayed exit might have similar consequences and delay long-term, sustainable solutions if the beneficiaries have become dependent on humanitarian assistance and have expectations that the Government is unable to satisfy.

32. A strategy is also required that outlines the criteria and process under which humanitarian assistance participants exit a complex emergency. Prerequisites for the implementation of an exit strategy include a significant reduction in the number of civilians impacted by the emergency, a successfully negotiated peace settlement and an end to hostilities, resumption of social, political and economic activities, restoration of human rights, and the existence of a government capacity to nurture and protect the population.

33. If a peace agreement is signed, the existing humanitarian coordination structure should be reviewed immediately in the light of changing objectives, scope and impact, focusing on the need to bridge humanitarian assistance with rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.

34. The resident/humanitarian coordinator should be charged with determining, in consultation with the in-country team and the Government, whether conditions exist for a total or partial exit of humanitarian participants. The final decision should be made by IASC.

III. CAPACITY OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM TO RESPOND TO COMPLEX CRISES

A. Early warning, contingency planning, preparedness, information and rapid response

35. An early warning capacity within the humanitarian sphere is a tool to improve decision-making in anticipation of crises. If linked to timely and decisive response mechanisms, early warning can assist in preparing for and even preventing crises.

36. Building on their areas of expertise, several agencies have developed early warning systems for specific crisis circumstances. For example, monitoring of food supply and demand (through the FAO Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS)), health (WHO) and refugee movements and numbers (through databases like the UNHCR REFWORLD) helps warn the humanitarian community of potential crises. The Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS) of DHA draws on the work of existing early warning mechanisms within and outside the United Nations system and brings sectoral information together with more specific socio-economic and political information. UNICEF and UNDP aim at prevention by identifying and addressing underlying vulnerabilities and several agencies' field presence plays an important role in their early warning capacity.

37. Much improvement has taken place in the development of information processes serving the system but information exchange could be further improved to strengthen the early warning capacity. To this effect, the inter-agency consultations on early warning should be resumed and the conclusions fed into the IASC process in order to facilitate contingency planning and preparedness.

38. Much of the effectiveness of the initial response to an emergency depends on the contingency planning and preparedness activities carried out in response to early warning signals. Contingency planning includes identification of possible emergency scenarios, their differing impacts and resulting humanitarian needs, evaluation of existing capacities and actions needed to strengthen capacity, and overcoming or mitigating obstacles to effective response. Contingency planning should be followed by country-specific preparedness actions.

39. The past two years have seen an increasing acceptance of the need for more systematic implementation of contingency planning and field-level

preparedness. The United Nations system should also increase understanding and garner support from local authorities for concrete preparedness actions. In addition, there is a critical need for the development of a common inter-agency methodology for contingency planning to provide a basis of common planning parameters. To the extent feasible these efforts should involve as wide a range of humanitarian partners as possible, including NGOs.

40. United Nations international and national staff in-country typically handle the immediate response and are the core around which the subsequent emergency response effort is built. If a rapid increase in in-country staff capacity is necessary, United Nations agencies use various rapid deployment staffing mechanisms, including stand-by teams, and sometimes supplement these with experienced staff from outside the United Nations system or with United Nations Volunteers. United Nations agencies have generally developed adequate capacity to rapidly deploy necessary staff and relief and logistical support materials (vehicles, personal support kits, etc.).

41. Special mechanisms to handle fast-breaking emergencies at Headquarters level include de facto task forces that integrate and coordinate Headquarters activities and emergency situation centres that act as focal points for information processing, reporting, and management coordination of the agency's response. Individual agencies have also established special emergency administrative, financial, procurement and other support procedures in order to accelerate their emergency response. However, within the United Nations Secretariat, most rules and procedures are not conducive to rapid response. More streamlined United Nations system procedures for rapid recruitment, and more flexible procedures in general should be pursued.

42. Many United Nations agencies have decentralized their operations through increased delegation of authority to the field, combined with setting up or markedly strengthening regional and sub-regional offices. The merits of decentralization include quicker response to field needs, greater sensitivity and understanding of local conditions and enhanced ability of the in-country team to take timely and effective decisions, under the leadership of the resident/humanitarian coordinator.

43. Although contingency planning and implementation of situation-specific preparedness measures are inexpensive activities and can be extremely beneficial should an emergency actually occur, inadequate funding remains an important constraint to their development. Efforts should be encouraged to

include funding for preparedness actions in consolidated appeals in the context of an ongoing emergency. However, this approach is not viable for actions needed before a sizable complex emergency. Possible alternatives include the setting up of trust funds, utilization of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, broadening the authority of United Nations agencies to utilize standby emergency funds, and increasing the level of funds provided for these purposes.

44. In any crisis, each United Nations agency collects and disseminates information and analysis on its mandated sector and the implementation of their humanitarian activities. In order for the humanitarian coordinator and the Emergency Relief Coordinator to carry out strategic planning, coordination and advocacy, they must have timely and accurate information and analysis to inform their decision-making. In addition, the humanitarian coordinator is also expected to collate, analyse and disseminate information on the crisis.

45. In response to the information gap that existed during the earlier stages of the crises in the Great Lakes region of Africa, DHA formed the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) to manage an up-to-date flow of information to and from humanitarian participants engaged in the Great Lakes region. IRIN synthesizes and analyses information from a wide variety of sources. An IRIN/West Africa is now being established. DHA has also developed ReliefWeb as a platform for field and Headquarters information related to crisis preparedness and response. ReliefWeb consolidates and organizes information on current humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters and makes this information immediately available on the Internet.

B. Local capacities/relief and development

46. The importance of mutually supportive actions addressing relief and development aspects of emergency situations has been recognized as critical to saving lives and sustaining livelihoods. Collaborative actions in volatile conditions contribute to averting conflict-related emergencies, mitigate against further deterioration of support systems and establish early foundations for recovery. Development activities can take place effectively side by side with emergency activities in many crisis situations. Organizations such as UNICEF and WFP with mandates for both relief and development have a useful advantage in efforts to link relief and development.

47. Populations and institutions stricken by emergencies often resort to a variety of coping mechanisms that, while inadequate, provide a means of survival. Recent programme reviews and evaluations have highlighted negative consequences of relief assistance and its potential to undermine local capacities. At the same time, additional experience has been gained in identifying ways and means by which relief assistance can strengthen local capacities, including those of women and women's organizations, thus helping to underpin longer-term processes of recovery. As emphasized by the World Food Summit, although the provision of free relief goods is often needed to address the threat of immediate starvation, such relief distributions should be approached with greater caution.

48. Over the past two years, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) has undertaken an extensive examination of the role of the United Nations system in post-conflict situations. The review identified the need to develop a comprehensive approach covering action (a) during both crisis and post-crisis conditions, (b) linking relief and development, and (c) involving extended partnerships with other external participants and with national and local authorities. IASC has, at the same time, adopted a number of important principles and agreements aimed at enhancing the consideration of coping mechanisms and capacities in United Nations relief operations. Full complementarity with the IASC review has been ensured through cross-participation between CCPOQ and IASC working groups.

49. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) has supported the need for parallel and complementary actions. It concurred that relief and development programmes must overcome divisions reflected and reinforced by the separation of approaches, budgets and functions. ACC has also endorsed the need for broad elements of a strategic framework, concentrating on three primary components: analysis of in-country environment; setting of policy parameters; and the establishment of priorities for the response programme. The formulation of this framework will be flexible and pragmatic.

C. Resource mobilization and United Nations financial capacity for humanitarian assistance

50. The success of collective response to humanitarian crises depends not only on a well-coordinated and integrated plan of action, but also on the availability of the human, material and financial resources necessary to

ensure that timely assistance is provided. With increasing demands on donor resources, there is a demand for an approach to resource mobilization that meets prioritized needs within a broader framework - one that sets clear goals, helps to better address the causes of the crisis, and forges the links with recovery.

Financial capacity and emergency funding mechanisms

51. Over the past few years the variety and scope of mechanisms for funding of humanitarian assistance programmes, and in particular rapid response to crises, have increased significantly. At present, United Nations organizations resort to trust funds, the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, agency specific emergency funds, and voluntary contributions to finance their response to crises. Individual organizations have, over the past year, provided their governing bodies with comprehensive information on their own financial capacities, highlighting enhancements and areas where additional strengthening or flexibility is required.

52. One of the primary mechanisms designed to ensure the rapid response of United Nations organizations to an emergency is the Central Emergency Revolving Fund managed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Since the Fund was established in 1992, a total of US$ 124 million has been disbursed, of which $111 million has been reimbursed. The Fund has maintained a solid financial standing and has been utilized by operational organizations of the United Nations system on 48 occasions to meet urgent relief requirements.

53. Of the disbursements, $109 million (88 per cent) were made during the period 1992 to 1994. In 1995 and 1996, only six advances were requested by United Nations operational agencies, representing a total of $11.8 million. Requests for utilization of the Fund over the past two years have declined dramatically for several reasons. The absence of a waiver for high-risk loans (i.e., where there is no assurance of reimbursement from a donor) has made agencies reluctant to borrow from the Fund in fear of not being able to repay the balance. Also, individual organizations have made efforts both to increase their own internal emergency resources and to minimize those administrative procedures which in the past precluded action in advance of the actual receipt of funds. Finally, fewer large-scale emergencies have occurred during this period than in the first three years of the Fund's existence.

54. During the current review process, recommendations were formulated to create a "second window", which would enhance the capacity of organizations to

meet priority needs, particularly in critically under-funded sectors and in less visible situations where donor support is less forthcoming. There has, however, been reluctance among donor countries to accept such a proposal. Consultations are required to provide options on how the Fund could be structured to ensure its continued effectiveness. IASC has proposed that NGOs that have been identified as implementing partners within the consolidated appeal should be able to access the Fund.

During the emergency

55. The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) remains the single most important mechanism for coordinating and facilitating the capacity of the United Nations system to meet its emergency resource requirements. During the period of 1992 to 1996, a total of $10.4 billion was made available through 68 appeals launched by DHA.

56. An extensive review of the CAP has been undertaken with the objective of formulating recommendations on how it can best enhance individual agency initiatives within a common framework of collaboration, integration and prioritization. One theme that has arisen repeatedly has been the fundamental importance of developing a strategic framework that sets clear goals for the humanitarian programme and provides a holistic approach incorporating relief and development where appropriate. The CAP - a field based programming process - serves as a resource mobilization tool for the implementation of the strategic framework. IASC has identified the responsibilities of agencies and the resident/humanitarian coordinator for ensuring prioritization, emphasizing the importance of the country level consultations in setting the priorities. It was also agreed that relevant activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should be included in the CAP.

57. While re-affirming the CAP guidelines, IASC organizations have agreed that there is a lack of coordination between resource mobilization and planning processes in the relief and development community. This results in gaps, delays and/or duplication of efforts. An approach that allows relief and development-oriented aid to co-exist in a mutually reinforcing manner is essential. Rather than creating new mechanisms which might cause further compartmentalization in funding approaches, the CAP should be expanded to cover rehabilitation and recovery requirements. The Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Administrator of UNDP, in consultation with IASC, should examine ways of operationalizing this approach.

58. Traditional dichotomies in donor funding pockets may hinder the provision of resources to meet simultaneous relief and development needs, as well as to address rehabilitation and recovery activities. Obtaining resources for transition activities presents a further challenge as there has been a downward trend in financing available for development cooperation. Another problem is the slowness in donor disbursement procedures for rehabilitation and recovery.

59. While the integrated programming approach of the CAP should be strengthened, it must be recognized that when resources are inadequate for certain sectors or types of activities, the effectiveness of the overall humanitarian programme is compromised. Failure to provide assistance for rehabilitation activities, such as in agricultural recovery, risks the creation of relief dependency syndrome among persons affected by crisis and may result in increased assistance requirements at a later date.

60. In recognition of the fact that there must be a mechanism for rapidly mobilizing resources wherever a new emergency exists, the DHA-coordinated flash appeal mechanism will be utilized within 10 days of the crisis in order to secure immediate first-phase funding. If necessary, this should be followed by a fully-developed strategic framework and a consolidated appeal. The relationship between the programmes and funding requirements in the flash appeal and the CAP must be clarified.

D. Accountability, monitoring and evaluation of Humanitarian activities

61. The main task of monitoring is to measure the progress of activities and output against established schedules and factors from which changes in the programme can be decided. Because of the greater complexity of today's humanitarian programmes, monitoring should pay particular attention to inter-relationships of projects and components and to the effectiveness of management and coordination arrangements.

62. The past two years have witnessed a spate of initiatives in the United Nations system, in inter-governmental organizations, and within the donor and NGO communities aimed at increasing the accountability of humanitarian assistance providers vis-à-vis both the donors and the recipients of assistance. Individual donors and NGOs are also increasingly concerned with the need to regulate humanitarian activities through verifiable training standards, personnel practices and reporting procedures.

63. IASC has agreed that simple field-based monitoring systems should be established in all complex emergency situations in which the United Nations system is involved in order to facilitate accountability, to optimize utilization of resources, to avoid duplication of effort and to adapt to changing circumstances. The establishment of the system will be an inter-agency effort carried out under the leadership of the resident/humanitarian coordinator. It is intended to reinforce existing monitoring activities carried out by operational organizations for various sectors or target groups. Efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of NGOs and donor representatives as well as national and local entities of governance in the programming and review process. It is essential that the resident/humanitarian coordinator, in collaboration with all relevant participants, set objectives with clear benchmarks of assistance.

64. Monitoring should be seen as an integral part of the programming cycle - its outputs are essential for re-programming and re-assessing priorities. The guidelines for consolidated appeal preparation, if fully applied, provide a coherent framework and programming structure against which progress and constraints could be measured. Therefore, the process of monitoring should be clearly stated in the consolidated appeal for a country, and resources required for monitoring identified in the CAP. Also, the monitoring system should be coupled with tracking by DHA of funding of consolidated appeals to form the basis of a consolidated reporting system on the direction and performance of the humanitarian programme.

65. One of the advantages of a joint monitoring capacity is that it will provide a sound basis for more in-depth lessons learned and evaluation exercises. Ideally, such monitoring will automatically lead to systemic evaluation of humanitarian programmes. IASC plans to devote one of its forthcoming sessions to the issue of lessons learned and evaluation as well as the possibility of maintenance of an inter-agency mechanism.

E. Human resources management and development issues

66. The United Nations system for humanitarian response can only be as effective as the people assigned to implement it. Thus, it is essential for the United Nations system to recruit, train, support and retain the best staff available to work in crisis situations.

67. Recognizing the difficulty of rapidly obtaining sufficient qualified personnel for deployment in crisis situations, IASC has adopted a number of

recommendations aimed at increasing the flexibility and professionalism of the humanitarian response. These recommendations encompass ways to simplify recruitment procedures, calling for further development of rapid response teams, standardized evaluation, and provision of adequate entitlement packages.

68. With increased emphasis by the agencies, both the quantity and quality of training has improved in recent years. Individual agencies are responsible for and appropriately provide the preponderance of training on emergency technical and sectoral issues to their staff. Training in better contextual analysis of the emergency situation and gender sensitization remain a priority for all training initiatives.

69. All agencies participate actively in workshops to facilitate national capacity-building and strengthen in-country coordination, which are conducted through the Disaster Management Training Programme (DMTP) and, jointly organized and sponsored by UNDP and DHA. United Nations agencies participate in the newly formulated DMTP Steering Committee and contribute to the design of programme modules. Additional training for the United Nations system, also involving in-country counterparts, is provided by the United Nations Staff College Project through its programme of training in support of a coordinated response for countries experiencing crisis.

70. On a system-wide basis the Complex Emergencies Training Initiative (CETI) is the main inter-agency forum in which training on general issues of humanitarian assistance is discussed; policy questions that arise are referred to the IASC (Working Group). CETI focuses on fostering teamwork and a culture of cooperation and coordination. IASC has identified several areas in which CETI should continue to prepare training materials and identify additional training resources for field staff.

71. The conditions under which much humanitarian assistance is provided - isolation of humanitarian staff from their families, risk of illness and injury, and increasing insecurity - are resulting in a steady rise in stress and health problems. IASC recommendations include provision of adequate insurance coverage and address the fact that local staff are the most vulnerable, yet with contracts and security arrangements that are significantly less supportive than for international staff.

F. Security

72. In fulfilment of the responsibilities entrusted to them by Member States, United Nations personnel have increasingly performed their functions in extremely hazardous conditions not normally encountered in the past. This is particularly true in areas where government authority is not adequately exercised or is non-existent. Whereas in the past personnel were assured protection by virtue of their association with the United Nations, staff are now increasingly at risk because of such association. In addition, actions by the United Nations in one part of the globe can generate threats to United Nations personnel in another.

73. As a result casualties have mounted. In 1992, one staff member was killed every month; in 1993, the rate was one every two weeks, and in 1994, it exceeded one a week. In 1995 and 1996, the numbers dropped back to one a month. By 1 March 1997, there had been nine fatalities or more than four per month. From 1992 to the present, over 131 staff members have lost their lives and 119 have been taken hostage.

74. The Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator and the concerned United Nations agencies have therefore acted to strengthen the United Nations security system. For example, there has been an increase in the number of professional level Field Security Officers who work under the direct supervision of the Designated Official (a senior official, normally the United Nations Resident Coordinator, responsible for security of United Nations staff and property at the duty station) and the United Nations Security Management Team. These Security Officers may be funded through a cost-sharing mechanism, or be employed directly by one of the United Nations agencies.

75. Based on the recommendation of the 1996 Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting on Security, the Administrative Committee on Coordination approved measures developed by The Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (in collaboration with the participating United Nations entities), such as streamlining the recruitment of Field Security Officers, sharing security-related information, and development of a standardized system-wide security training programme.

76. The cost of providing security and dealing with related stress cannot be seen as an optional item in the budgets of agencies whose staff are being asked to risk their lives for the United Nations. These security-related

costs, are still relatively small in relation to the total costs of United Nations relief efforts. However, too often such costs are questioned or under-funded, whether the funds are sought by the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator or by one of the organizations of the United Nations system. Member States are requested to provide the resources needed for such priority items as: adequate number of professional Field Security Officers, computers and telecommunications equipment, protective equipment and security stores, security training for all staff, and adequate systems for helping staff dealing with critical incident stress.

77. Members States can also assist with advocacy actions directed at promoting the safety of United Nations staff and providing resources.

78. Organizations of the United Nations system are sometimes the targets of accusations of serious lack of impartiality and active involvement in local affairs by local officials. This is often fuelled by unwarranted criticism from the central government. Member States should intervene in these circumstances, reminding governments of the United Nations principles of neutrality, and the commitment to it of the agencies involved.

79. The militarization of all refugees and internally displaced persons camps should be strongly condemned and governments should be requested to deal with such circumstances as a matter of urgency. The international community should be prepared to provide the necessary assistance and expertise to do this - if so requested. The result would probably be a great saving in lives and resources and a quicker return by refugees to their countries of origin.

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

80. As the end of the twentieth century approaches, the international community is reminded that the creativity and capacity exist to make extraordinary advances in science and technology, but the commitment and commonality of purpose have yet to be demonstrated that would put an end to warfare, growing marginalization, and the vulnerability of millions of people.

81. This is a time of dramatic change but one of the enduring characteristics of the post-Cold War period is the way in which crises and conflict continue to disrupt and destroy the lives and livelihoods of civilians. Providing humanitarian assistance in today's crisis zones demands not only an efficient relief delivery system but a capacity to protect

vulnerable populations in order for them to survive in a hostile environment, and also the capacity to avoid becoming a substitute for the action necessary to eradicate the roots of conflict.

82. In today's world of increased internal strife, disputed authority, disintegrating state systems, and the breaking apart of societal structures, the political agenda of conflicting parties is often difficult to determine. Injustice, political oppression, human rights abuses, social and economic inequalities, and the absence of democratic freedom and development opportunities are often part of a complex mix of underlying factors contributing to conflict. In many instances, warfare is triggered and sustained by the manipulation of fears and animosities that may have little bearing on real or perceived grievances; group identity along ethnic or communal lines has become the rationale for intolerance, racism, hatred and such repugnant concepts as "ethnic cleansing".

83. In war zones where there are no front lines; when whole communities and population groups become "the enemy" and the aim of warfare is to destroy and displace them, it is vital to reconceptualize threats to the peace and the role of humanitarian action in alleviating suffering.

84. In a time when humanitarian action has, as never before, faced levels of abuse, distortion and cynicism, the decision of the Council to request a study of the United Nations relief system was both timely and prescient. The outcome of this exercise must not be seen as an end in itself but as an important contribution to the wider endeavour of strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to tackle the causes as well as the consequences of crises.

85. An improved capacity to respond to humanitarian needs depends not only on the effectiveness of the United Nations relief system to help those in need of assistance to cope with crises but also on the commitment of Member States to deal with the problems which generate upheaval and political turmoil.

86. The phenomenon of protracted and growing displacement, warfare that targets civilians and demolishes communities, and the disintegration of political, institutional and economic structures in crisis countries all point to the need for a better understanding of crises and their adverse impact on vulnerable communities. Increased attention to the gender dimensions of conflict and crisis is important. There is an equal need to understand the impact of life-saving and life-sustaining interventions geared to mitigating and undoing the harm that characterizes contemporary crises.

87. This review and several other recent studies, including the Multi-Donor Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, highlight the importance of improved accountability on the part of all those involved in crisis management. There is a general concern that current approaches are inadequate and greater effectiveness needs to be achieved in addressing the immediate longer-term requirements generated by crises.

88. The humanitarian community has already taken steps to develop common standards and indicators essential for determining the overall impact of multi-sectoral interventions on intended beneficiaries, with particular emphasis on the way in which relief action strengthens or undermines indigenous capabilities and recovery processes.

89. Within the humanitarian arena, there needs to be a stronger capacity to monitor the overall direction and effectiveness of humanitarian operations, including the way in which funding and resource allocation decisions affect the realization of a coherent response.

90. In line with the larger United Nations system reform, greater attention and resources need to be made available to developing a deeper understanding of crises, including the way in which policy emanating from different fora impact on the humanitarian endeavour. A commitment to improved accountability necessitates specific steps to utilize lessons and insights gained from different experiences in a manner which leads to improved policy and our collective ability to respond effectively to crises.

91. This report will not be complete without paying a special tribute to the United Nations staff and other humanitarian workers who have lost their lives in the line of duty in bringing relief to human suffering. The United Nations is indebted to and proud of the thousands of humanitarian workers who continue to provide relief to disaster victims in increasingly insecure environments world-wide.

Notes

1/ MOUs and similar agreements currently exist between WFP and UNICEF, FAO and WFP, and between UNHCR and each of UNICEF, WFP, UNDP and WHO; cooperative links are being developed between WHO and UNICEF.

2/ Since the creation of IASC, there has been certain ambiguities as to the exact responsibilities and commitments of the non-United Nations members which have a standing invitation to participate. ICRC has given consistent proof of its commitment to cooperation, while stressing its independence towards policy statements issued by the IASC and its subsidiary bodies.

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COORDINATION, PROGRAMME AND OTHER QUESTIONS: PROCLAMATION OF INTERNATIONAL YEARS

Note verbale dated 8 July 1997 from the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Geneva addressed to the United Nations Office in Geneva

The Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Geneva has the honour to attach herewith the explanatory note with regard to the draft resolution to be before the Economic and Social Council (E/1997/L.24) on the question of the proclamation of the year 2001 as the international year of volunteers.

The Permanent Mission of Japan has further the honour to request the Secretariat of the United Nations Office in Geneva to have the explanatory note circulated as an official document of the Council.

GE.97-62602 (E)

Annex

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Background

1. The concept of an International Year of Volunteers emerged at a Policy Forum held jointly by the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the United Nations University in Tokyo in February 1996. The concept arose also in deliberations of several major international non-governmental organizations, such as the International Association for Volunteer Effort, the European Volunteer Centre and the World Young Women's Christian Association. The idea was also endorsed by the 40 volunteer-sending organizations attending the Conference on International Volunteerism, held in Washington, D.C. in May 1996, on the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Peace Corps and the twenty-fifth anniversary of UNV.

2. At the annual session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund, held in May 1996, the Executive Board, in response to Japan's initiative, took note of a proposal "to consider having the International Year of Volunteers 2001 as one of the instruments to promote volunteers".

3. In February 1997, at its 1997 organizational session the Economic and Social Council, in its decision 1997/201, agreed to a proposal made by the Government of Japan to place the international year of volunteers on the agenda of its 1997 substantive session.

Objectives and outline

4. Volunteer service - the contribution that individuals make as non-profit, non-wage and non-career action for the well-being of those less fortunate - has been a part of every civilization and society. The need for such volunteer effort is greater today than ever, given the adverse impact of global problems such as environmental degradation, drug abuse or HIV/AIDS on the more vulnerable sectors of society, given the concern of the international community for the eradication of poverty and given the contemporary trend for civil society, in partnership with Governments and the private sector, to assume ever greater responsibilities in the development process. Yet, while the contribution of volunteers is vast, much of their work often goes unrecognized, precisely because it does not involve the payment of market wages and because it is often spontaneous, informal and unstructured.

5. When the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake struck in 1995 and when the Nakhodka oil pollution incident occurred this year, many volunteers from throughout Japan rushed to the stricken areas and this had the effect of raising the Japanese people's awareness of volunteer activities. The Japanese Government intends to turn such disasters into an opportunity to further heighten the Japanese people's awareness and understanding of volunteer activities and to foster an environment conducive to promoting volunteers' activities of this kind in Japan.

6. The Government of Japan feels that proclamation of an International Year of Volunteers would extend recognition and increased legitimacy to volunteering and, as a result, would expand significantly the number of people willing to offer their services. Volunteer movements would receive valuable impetus in industrialized, developing countries, as well as those in economic transition alike. Such a Year would engender a favourable environment for the sharing of best practices and would assist in associating the volunteer movement yet more closely with the key concerns of the United Nations as articulated through the series of summits and conferences up to 1996.

7. The specific objectives of the Year would be increased recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteer service. As the forms and status of volunteers vary by country and region, the Year would be engendered from the locality and grassroots upward, concentrating on the local community, the citizen's group, the village, the inhabitants of the megacity, and not on a world summit on volunteerism. In this way, there should be no financial burden on Member States.

8. In terms of recognition, every opportunity should be taken to describe and quantify the contribution of the voluntary sector to national welfare and advancement; awards might be instituted for innovative individual, group, community and national volunteer actions. To facilitate volunteer service, each society, which is best placed to judge what would most encourage such service among its people, could take concrete measures to enable volunteering, for instance, technical, management and accountability training. The media, from an Internet discussion forum to rural radio broadcasts, could assist in networking best practice locally, at provincial level and between countries. Finally, promotional efforts might be aimed at attracting more requests for the deployment of volunteers, at attracting offers of service from new candidates and generally creating a climate of opinion ever more supportive of voluntary action.

Next steps

9. At the 1997 substantive session of the Council, Japan will propose the adoption of a resolution stating that the Council recommends to the General Assembly the proclamation of 2001 the International Year of Volunteers.

10. At the fifty-second session of the Assembly, starting from September this year, Japan will propose the adoption of a resolution stating that the Assembly proclaims 2001 the International Year of Volunteers.